



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

December 16-December 31, 2008

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS

Rural Afghans Receive Assistance to Endure the Harsh Winter:

This year, Afghanistan has suffered from skyrocketing food prices, drought, and continued poverty. As another bitterly-cold winter approaches, USAID is committed to helping the people of Afghanistan overcome these difficulties.

This month, USAID worked with Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to fund a winter relief program in the south and east of the country. The Afghan government will deliver more than 14,000 kits to thirteen different provinces, providing relief to Afghanistan's most vulnerable groups, including the elderly, widows and the disabled. The kits contain items essential to winter survival, such as emergency shelters, clothing and blankets, and heating materials. Upon receiving the goods, local government officials will distribute them in their provinces, demonstrating their commitment to respond to the urgent needs of their communities. Most importantly, these emergency relief materials will save lives and prevent sickness as the nation works to recover from a history of war and an ongoing insurgency.



Preparing winter relief kits.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



A USAID-built cellar in Badakhshan province.

PHOTO: USAID/ASAP

AGRICULTURE AND ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Better Storage Helps Farmers Replace Poppy with Potatoes:

When USAID introduced a new potato variety in northern Badakhshan province, the area's farmers experienced an explosion in new yields. The high-quality potato seeds improved production by 204 percent, providing another incentive for farmers to reject poppy production in favor of the lucrative potato market. Four years ago, more than 15,600 hectares in the province were covered with opium poppy. Today, less than 200 hectares are devoted to opium cultivation.

To help sustain this bountiful crop, USAID has constructed 15 root cellars in the province, helping farmers store up to 250 metric tons of seeds and root vegetables throughout Badakhshan's long winter. The cellars, available to members of USAID-funded agricultural cooperatives, will protect the seeds from the extreme weather, reducing the amount lost by nearly 50 percent. The ability to store the harvested potatoes will mean that farmers can



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sell the root vegetables at a higher profit during the cold winter months and that next spring they will have plenty of high-quality potato seeds to sell and plant.

DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE

New Radio Station Gives Community a Voice:

The free exchange of information and ideas is key to any developing democracy. This month, USAID launched a new, independent radio station in Afghanistan's central Bamyan province, bringing vital information to over 100,000 people in the region. After construction, USAID supplied high-quality broadcast equipment and trained the staff on how to use the modern technologies. The radio station will empower Bamyan's residents to make informed decisions about their lives by reporting on important information issues such as health, education, and human rights. In addition, the people of Bamyan will gain access to new entertainment, sports, and radio dramas, bringing music and hope in an area where it was once forbidden by the Taliban.



USAID trained staff on using the modern broadcast equipment.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Women Legal Professionals Enhance Skills: As Afghan women find new voices, a new community of professionals is growing. This December, USAID helped organize a national Women Legal Professionals Leadership Workshop for 180 women judges, lawyers, and law and Sharia academics from all over Afghanistan.

During the three-day conference in Kabul, participants developed their leadership, time-management, and communication skills so they can better meet the challenges of their jobs and strike a more comfortable work-life balance. Led by experienced international and national trainers, the conference focused on the opportunities and challenges specific to women working in Afghanistan's justice sector and included hands-on learning exercises. "This is a very important initiative," said Minister of Women's Affairs Hoson Banu Ghazanfar, "because the empowerment and building of self confidence among women is the key to women's success in every field they work in."



Over 180 female legal professionals from eleven provinces attended the workshop.

PHOTO: USAID/ARoLP



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

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ECONOMIC GROWTH

Afghanistan's Gemstones Brighten the Future: Afghanistan has an abundance of natural minerals and is the source of some of the world's finest emeralds, rubies, aquamarine and lapis. These gems have the potential to bring up to \$300 million a year to Afghanistan, yet the country lacks the skilled workers, government oversight and infrastructure to reach this potential. As a result, many of these stones end up sold on the black market, depriving the country of the profits and growth it so badly needs.



Reporters from Tolo TV filming a documentary on how to use the new directory.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Afghan Journalists Tell a Story of Better

Business: This year, USAID successfully opened the Afghanistan Central Business Registry (ACBR) at the Ministry of Commerce, allowing Afghan businesses to register in a single step. The new streamlined, computerized process is a major improvement in efficiency, and brings business registration several steps closer to the ultimate goal – the ability to register a business online from any location in Afghanistan. This year's reform has successfully reduced registration time for Afghan businesses from six to eight days to two hours, and moves the country's registration practices to international standards. More than 1,250 businesses have already registered in the new system.

In November, Afghanistan's Tolo TV visited and filmed the new system's process, boosting the public's awareness of the procedure and encouraging Afghan businesses to participate. The program, which aired twice, included interviews with different businesspeople who explained the benefits of the system and showed its simplicity. Improving the environment for private sector development is key to fostering sustainable economic growth for Afghanistan's economy and its citizens.